

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 016067

FOL REPEAT PONTA DELGADA 016 ACTION SECSTATE INFO LISBON
OPORTO COMUSFORAZ USCINCEUR CINCLANT DTD 19 JAN.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PONTA DELGADA 016

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: INDEPENDENCE LEADER PACKS LOCAL THEATER

1. ON JANUARY 18 INDEPENDENCE LEADER JOSE ALMEIDA GAVE A WELL PUBLICIZED SPEECH COMPARING MALTA AND THE AZORES. THE SPEECH WAS SPONSORED BY A GROUP CALLED "FRIENDS OF PONTA DELGADA" WHO FINANCED ALMEIDA'S TRIP TO MALTA TO STUDY AN INDEPENDENT ARCHEPELAGO WITH A POPULATION SIMILAR TO THE AZORES. PUBLICITY FOR THE SPEECH INCLUDED NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS, NOTICES IN LOCAL CAFES, A RADIO PROGRAM AND PERSONAL INVITATIONS MAILED TO MANY. ALMEIDA DREW A STANDING ROOM ONLY CROWD ESTIMATED AT 1500. OBSERVERS REPORTED SEEING PEOPLE OF ALL CLASSES AND FROM ALL OVER THE ISLAND OF SAO MIGUEL AND TELEGRAMS WERE READ FROM ANGRA AND HORTA. ALMEIDA'S PICTURE DECORATED THE WALLS OF THE THEATER AND HAS SINCE APPEARED IN CAFES
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AND STORE WINDOWS IN PONTAL DELGADA. THE ORDERLY BUT ENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS AND THE INDEPENDENCE HYMN AND MSE (STUDENT SEPARATIST MOVEMENT) MEMBERS CHANTED "INDEPENDENCE". OBSERVERS SAY ALMEIDA DID NOT ADVOCATE INDEPENDENCE IN HIS SPEECH BUT THE IDEA WAS CLEARLY PRESENT IN HIS COMPARISON OF MALTA AND THE AZORES.

1. COMMENT: ONE OBSERVER DESCRIBED THE SESSION AS AN INDEPENDENCE RALLY. IT WAS THE LARGEST PUBLIC PRO-INDEPENDENCE EVENT IN OVER A YEAR. THE PROMINENT DISPLAY OF ALMEIDA'S PICTURE IS AN ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY HIM AS THE INDEPENDENCE LEADER. THIS HAS ALREADY PROVOKED SOME NEGATIVE COMMENTS FROM THOSE WHO OTHERWISE THOUGHT THE SPEECH A SUCCESS. ALMEIDA IS SCHEDULED TO APPEAR IN COURT ON FEBRUARY 16 WITH REFERENCE TO HIS PUBLICATION OF THE SEPARATIST NEWSPAPER "MILHAFRE". THE PICTURES ARE PROBABLY A PART OF A CAMPAIGN ALREADY UNDERWAY TO DEMONSTRATE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HIM AT THE TIME OF HIS COURT APPEARANCE.

3. THE LARGE CROWD ALMEIDA DREW IS A REMINDER THAT INDEPENDENCE IS FAR FROM A DEAD ISSUE IN THE AZORES. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT TODAY THE MAJORITY OF AZOREANS SUPPORT AUTONOMY. THE ACTIVE SUPPORTERS OF INDEPENDENCE ARE A SMALL MINORITY, BUT INDEPENDENCE REMAINS IN THE BACK OF THE MIND OF A GREAT MANY OTHER AZOREANS AS AN OPTION FOR THE FUTURE OR IN THE EVENT OF A MAJOR CRISIS ON THE CONTINENT. PFFIFLE

UNQUOTE VANCE

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